Numb. DXIII.

The SPECTATOR.

——afflata est numine quando
Jam propiore Dei—— Virg.

Saturday, October 18. 1712.

THE following Letter comes to me from that Excellent Man in Holy Orders, whom I have mentioned more than once as one of that Society who assist me in my Speculations. It is a *Thought in Sickness*, and of a very serious Nature, for which Reason I give it a place in the Paper of this Day.

SIR,

'THE Indisposition which has long hung upon 'me, is at last grown to such an Head, that 'it must quickly make an End of me, or of it self. You may imagine, that whilst I am in this bad State of Health there are none of your Works which I read with greater Pleasure than your *Saturdays* Papers. I should be very glad if could furnish you with any Hints for that Day's Entertainment. Were I able to dress up several Thoughts of a serious Nature, which have made great Impressions on my Mind during a long Fit of Sickness, they might not be an improper Entertainment for that Occasion.

'Among all the Reflections which usually rise in the Mind of a sick Man, who has Time and Inclination to consider his approaching End, there is none more natural than that of his going to appear Naked and Unbodied before him who made him. When a Man considers, that, as soon as the vital Union is dissolved, he shall see that Supreme Being, whom he now contemplates at a Distance, and only in his Works; or, to speak more Philosophically, when by some Faculty in the Soul he shall apprehend the Divine Being, and be more sensible of his Presence, than we are now of the Presence of any Object which the Eye beholds, a Man must be lost in Carelessness and Stupidity, who is not alarmed at such a Thought. Dr. *Sherlock*, in his excellent Treatise upon Death, has represented, in very strong and lively Colours, the State of the Soul in its first Separation from the Body, with regard to that Invisible World which every where surrounds us, tho' we are not able to discover it through this grosser World of Matter which is accommodated to our Senses in this Life. His Words are as follow.

'*That Death, which is our leaving this World, is nothing else but our putting off these Bodies, teaches us, that it is only our Union to these Bodies, which intercepts the sight of the other World: The other World is not at such a Distance from us, as we may imagine; the Throne of God indeed is at a great remove from this Earth, above the third Heavens, where he displays his Glory to those blessed Spirits which encompass his Throne; but as soon as we step out of these Bodies, we step into the other World, which is not so properly another World, (for there is the same Heaven and Earth still) as a new State of Life. To live in these Bodies is to live in this World; to live out of them, is to remove into the next: For while our Souls are confin'd to these Bodies, and can look only thro' these material Casements, nothing but what is material can affect us, nay, nothing but what is so gross, that it can reflect Light, and convey the shapes and colours of things with it to the Eye: So that though within this visible World, there be a more glorious Scene of Things than what appears to us, we perceive nothing at all of it: for this Vail of Flesh parts the visible and invisible World: But when we put off these Bodies, there are new and surprizing Wonders present themselves to our view; when these material Spectacles are taken off, the Soul with its own naked Eyes sees what was invisible before: And then we are in the other World, when we can see it, and converse with it: Thus St.* Paul *tells us, That* when we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord; but when we are absent from the body, we are present with the Lord, 2 *Cor.* 5. 6, 8. *And methinks this is enough to cure us of our Fondness for these Bodies, unless we think it more desirable to be confined to a Prison, and to look through a Grate all our Lives, which gives us but a very narrow Prospect, and that none of the best neither, than to be set at liberty to view all the Glories of the World: What would we give now for the least Glimpse of that Invisible World, which the first step we take out of these Bodies will present us with? There are such things* as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive; *Death opens our Eyes, enlarges our Prospect, presents us with a new and*

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'*more glorious World, which we can never see, while we are shut up in Flesh, which should make us as willing to part with this Veil, as to take the Film off of our Eyes, which hinders our sight.*

'As a thinking Man cannot but be very much affected with the Idea of his appearing in the Presence of that Being *whom none can see and live*, he must be much more affected when he considers that this Being whom he appears before, will examine all the Actions of his past Life, and reward or punish him accordingly. I must confess that I think there is no Scheme of Religion, besides that of Christianity, which can possibly support the most virtuous Person under this Thought. Let a Man's Innocence be what it will, let his Virtues rise to the highest pitch of Perfection attainable in this Life, there will be still in him so many secret Sins, so many human Frailties, so many Offences of Ignorance, Passion, and Prejudice, so many unguarded Words and Thoughts, and in short, so many Defects in his best Actions, that, without the Advantages of such an Expiation and Attonement as Christianity has reveal'd to us, it is impossible that he should be cleared before his Soveraign Judge, or that he should be able *to stand in his Sight*. Our Holy Religion suggests to us the only Means whereby our Guilt may be taken away, and our imperfect Obedience accepted.

'It is this Series of Thought that I have endeavoured to express in the following Hymn, which I have composed during this my Sickness.

I.

WHEN rising from the Bed of Death,
O'erwhelm'd with Guilt and Fear,
I see my Maker, Face to Face,
O how shall I appear!

II.

If yet, while Pardon may be found,
And Mercy may be sought,
My Heart with inward Horrour shrinks,
And trembles at the Thought;

III.

When thou, O Lord, shalt stand disclos'd
In Majesty severe,
And sit in Judgment on my Soul,
O how shall I appear!

IV.

But thou hast told the troubled Mind,
Who does her Sins lament,
The timely Tribute of her Tears
Shall endless Woe prevent.

V.

Then see the Sorrows of my Heart
Ere yet it be too late;
And hear my Saviour's dying Groans,
To give these Sorrows weight.

VI.

For never shall my Soul despair
Her Pardon to procure,
Who knows thine only Son has dy'd
To make her Pardon sure.

'There is a noble Hymn in *French*, which Monsieur *Bayle* has celebrated for a very fine one, and which the famous Author of the Art of Speaking calls an *Admirable one*, that turns upon a Thought of the same Nature. If I could have done it Justice in *English*, I would have sent it you translated; it was written by Monsieur *Des Barreaux*, who had been one of the greatest Wits and Libertines in *France*, but in his last Years was as remarkable a Penitent.

GRand Dieu, tes jugemens sont remplis d'équité;
Toûjours tu prens plaisir à nous être propice:
Mais j'ai tant fait de mal, que jamais ta bonté
Ne me pardonnera sans choquer ta Justice.
Ouy, mon Dieu, la grandeur de mon impieté
Ne laisse à ton pouvoir que le choix du suplice:
Ton interest s'oppose à ma felicité:
Et ta clemence même attend que je perisse.
Contente ton desir puis qu'il t'est glorieux;
Offense toy des pleurs qui coulent de mes yeux;
Tonne, frappe, il est temps, rens moy guerre pour guerre.
J'adore en perissant la raison qui s'aigrit:
Mais dessus quel endroit tomberá ton tonnerre,
Qui ne soit tout couvert du sang de JESUS CHRIST.

'If these Thoughts may be serviceable to you, I desire you will place them in a proper Light, and am ever, with great Sincerity,

SIR,

Your, &c.

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